



Consumer Corner

by Illinois Attorney General LISA MADIGAN



CUTTING COSTS ON PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

For many Illinoisans, paying for prescription drugs each month is difficult, if not impossible. But there are some things consumers can do to cut the costs of their prescriptions. Here are some common questions about prescription drug costs, with explanations of how to reduce those costs and avoid getting ripped off.

Q: *My wife and I have health insurance, but we still have to pay the first \$25 on every prescription we have filled. My wife says we might save money if we comparison shop for our medications. I say that prescription drugs cost pretty much the same no matter where you buy them. Who's right?*

A: The suggestion to shop around is a good one. A recent survey conducted by my office shows that the cost of a prescription can range dramatically from pharmacy to pharmacy in the same city—even in the same neighborhood. If you shop around for the best price, be sure to let the pharmacist know all the medications you are taking. The best way to avoid dangerous drug interactions is to have all your prescriptions filled at one pharmacy.

Q: *I'm on Medicare. A guy called and offered to sell me a card that would give me a 50% discount on my prescription drugs for a \$300 enrollment fee. He said that a new federal law made it possible for him to make this offer. I was tempted at first, but I grew suspicious and hung up when he asked me to get a blank check and read him the numbers from the bottom of it. Was this a scam?*

A: Yes, this was one of many new scams involving drug cards. A new federal law does make prescription drug discount cards available to Medicare recipients, but none of

these cards cost more than \$30 per year and they are not sold by telemarketers or door-to-door salespersons. You should never share personal or financial information with a stranger who calls or comes to your door claiming to sell a Medicare-affiliated discount card.

Q: *I'd like to get one of the new prescription drug discount cards or join one of Illinois' drug discount programs to cut my costs, but I am confused and overwhelmed by all of the choices. How can I determine which card or program will be most beneficial for me?*

A: Prescription drug discount cards and programs can help some consumers save on their monthly medication expenses. The best thing you can do to ensure that you get the best card for you—and to determine whether you would benefit from a card at all—is to take your time and consider several options before making your decision. Make sure that the plan you choose covers the medicines you take and will be accepted by the local pharmacies that you use. Very low-income seniors may be eligible for \$600 from Medicare this year and next year to help pay for prescriptions. For more information about the Medicare discount drug benefit, as well as state pharmaceutical benefits for which you may be eligible, call the Department on Aging's Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966 (Voice/TTY).